

NJ YMCA State Alliance
Spirit of the YMCA Award Acceptance Remarks
Forsgate County Club, Monroe
October 6, 2011

I would like to thank the New Jersey YMCA Alliance for recognizing *ShapingNJ: The State Partnership for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention* with the “Spirit of the YMCA” award.

The Department is honored to accept this award from such an important partner in our *ShapingNJ* initiative.

I want to take a moment to recognize the Director of the Department’s Office of Nutrition and Fitness Peri Nearon, who is here this evening.

Peri would you please stand.

Peri has been our Department’s *Shaping NJ* leader and is the driving force behind its success.

Shaping NJ is a statewide movement developed to promote opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity to combat the growing obesity epidemic.

Nationally, childhood obesity has tripled in the last 30 years.

In New Jersey alone, the percentage of obese residents has risen from 15% in 1995 to 25% in 2010.

In our state, 15% of our children are obese and the state has the nation’s highest reported incidence of obesity—17.3%--among low-income children 2 to 5 years old.

In the past, obesity prevention has focused on the individual. However, we know that education about being physically active and eating healthy is not enough.

ShapingNJ is focused on creating environments to support healthy behavior – to make “the healthy choice the easy choice.”

We are working towards a shift in culture that recognizes the importance of nutrition and physical activity in all of our environments—where we live, work and play.

Some of our recent efforts include:

- Funding community pilot projects that will support vendors selling healthy snacks, farmers markets, walking and biking trails, and community gardens in high-need neighborhoods – because we know that access to healthy food & exercise are key to maintaining fitness

- Providing grants to 10 New Jersey hospitals to implement policies to promote exclusive breastfeeding from the moment of birth and to provide support to mothers – because we know that breastfeeding dramatically reduces the risk of childhood obesity
- And developing recommendations that will improve the health, nutrition and fitness of children in licensed child care centers – because establishing healthy habits, like exercise and eating fruits & vegetables, early in life puts children on the path to a healthy future

What makes *ShapingNJ* so special is that it is a collaborative effort—170 diverse stakeholders, including businesses, leaders of the state’s health care and public health communities, community-based organizations, as well as national and state leaders working together for policy and environmental changes that will make our communities healthier places to live.

Along with having a very long history of promoting physical activity, healthy eating and overall wellness, the YMCA Alliance has been a critical partner in making Shaping NJ successful.

The Y State Alliance has always been supportive of our efforts and has joined our Department in providing funding to communities to improve access to healthy food and physical activity by cultivating community gardens, helping small vendors sell healthy snacks and making it easier to walk and bike in the Garden State.

Our partnership is essential because combating the dramatic rise in obesity in New Jersey and nationally is a shared responsibility. Government cannot reverse this trend alone. We need everyone’s help.

There is still much work to be done.

However, the Department and our *ShapingNJ* partners are committed to furthering our efforts to make “the healthy choice the easy choice” and build a New Jersey where regular physical activity, good nutrition, and healthy weight are part of everyone’s life.

Thank you for recognizing our commitment to building a healthier New Jersey with this award.